

Light Freights By W. W. JACOBS Twin Spirits

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The "Terrace," consisting of eight gaunt houses, faced the sea, while the back rooms commanded a view of the ancient little town some half-mile distant. The beach, a waste of shingle, was desolate and bare except for a ruined bathing machine and a few pieces of linen drying in the winter sunshine. In the offing tiny steamers left a trail of smoke, while sailing-craft, their canvas glistening in the sun, slowly melted from the sight.

From the front windows of the third story of No. 1 Mrs. Cox, gazing out to sea, sighed softly. The season had been a bad one, and Mr. Cox had been even more troublesome than usual owing to tightness in the money market and the avowed preference of local publicans for cash transactions to assets in chalk and slate.

He had in his earlier days attempted to do a little work.

Mrs. Cox's meditations were disturbed by a knock at the front door. "Glad to see you, my dear," said the visitor, kissing her loudly.

"I've got my Uncle Joseph from London staying with us," continued the visitor, following her into the hall, "so I just got into the train and brought him down for a blow at the sea."

A question on Mrs. Cox's lips died away as a very small man who had been hidden by his niece came into sight.

"My Uncle Joseph," said Mrs. Berry; "Mr. Joseph Piper," she added.

Mr. Piper shook hands, and after a performance on the door-mat, protracted by reason of a festoon of hemp, followed his hostess into the faded drawing-room.

"And Mr. Cox?" inquired Mrs. Berry, in a cold voice.

Mrs. Cox shook her head. "He's been away this last three days," she said, flushing slightly.

"Looking for work?" suggested the visitor.

Mrs. Cox nodded, and, placing the tips of her fingers together, fidgeted gently.

"Why, where's your marble clock?"

"I never pawned a clock," Piper said, stroking his little gray head.

"I'll go on like this, my dear, till you're ruined," said the sympathetic Mrs. Berry, turning to her friend again; "what'll you do then?"

"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Cox. "I've had a bad season, too, and I'm so anxious about him in spite of it all. I can't sleep at nights for fearing that he's in some trouble. I'm sure I laid awake half last night crying."

"I might have known it was nonsense," retorted Mrs. Berry, hotly. "Can't you get him to take the pledge, Mary?"

"I couldn't insult him like that," said Mrs. Cox, with a shiver.

"What Cox wants is a shock," said Mrs. Berry; "you've dropped some crumbs on the carpet, uncle."

Mr. Piper apologized and said he had got his eye on them, and would pick

it," said Mr. Piper, in a voice more than tinged with sarcasm.

"Yes," said his niece, "that's what put it into my head."

"It's very kind of you, dear, and very kind of Mr. Piper," said Mrs. Cox, "but I couldn't think of it, I really couldn't."

"Uncle would be delighted," said Mrs. Berry.

Mr. Piper sniffed even as she spoke, but not at the sea.

"And I'll come for him the day after to-morrow," said Mrs. Berry.

It was the old story of the stronger will; Mrs. Cox after a feeble stand gave way altogether.

Several days after the quiet of the house was broken by the return of its master, whose annoyance, when he found the drawing-room clock stolen and a man in possession, was alarming in its vehemence. He lectured his wife severely on her mismanagement, and after some hesitation announced his intention of going through her books.

Mrs. Cox gave them to him, and, armed with pen and ink and four square inches of pink blotting-paper, he performed feats of balancing which made him a very Blondin of finance.

"I can't help it," said Mrs. Cox, wiping her eyes. "I'm sure I've done all I could to keep a home together. I can't even raise money on anything."

Mr. Cox, who had been glancing round the room again, looked up sharply.

"Why not?" he inquired.

"The broker's man," said Mrs. Cox, nervously; "he's made an inventory of everything, and he holds us responsible."

Mr. Piper, who was already very tired of his imprisonment, looked up curiously as he heard the door pushed

open, and discovered an elderly gentleman with an appearance of great stateliness staring at him. In the ordinary way he was one of the meekest of men, but the insolence of this stare was outrageous. Mr. Piper, opening his mild blue eyes wide, stared back. Whereupon Mr. Cox, fumbling in his vest pocket, found a pair of folders, and putting them astride his nose, gazed at the pseudo-broker's man with crushing effect.

"Where is your warrant or order, or whatever you call it?" demanded Cox.

"I've complied with the law by showing it once," said Mr. Piper, bluffing, "and I'm not going to show it again."

"Vulture!" Cox cried, in a terrible voice.

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Mr. Cox waved his hand towards the window.

"Fly," he said, briefly.

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"Eh?" said the other; "not a broker's man? What are you, then?"

In eager, trembling tones Mr. Piper told him, and, gathering confidence as he proceeded, related the conversation which had led up to his imposture, and as he concluded threw himself into a chair, and gave way to a terrible outburst of grief.

"The way I've worked for that woman," he said, brokenly, "to think it should come to this! The deceit of the thing; the wickedness of it. My heart is broken; I shall never be the same man again—never!"

"I might frighten my wife," mused the amiable Mr. Cox; "it would be a lesson to her not to be deceitful again. And, by Jove, I'll get some money from her to escape with; I know she's got some, and if she hasn't she will have in a day or two. There's a little pub at Newstead, eight miles from here, where we could be as happy as fighting cocks with a fiver or two. And while we're there enjoying ourselves my wife'll be half out of her mind trying to account for your disappearance to Mrs. Berry."

He patted the hesitating Mr. Piper on the back, and letting him out through the garden, indicated the road. Then he returned to the drawing-room, and carefully rumpling his hair, tore his collar from the stud, overturned a couple of chairs and a small table, and sat down to wait as pa-

tiently as he could for the return of his wife.

He waited about 20 minutes, and then he heard a key turn in the door below and his wife's footsteps slowly mounting the stairs. By the time she reached the drawing-room his tableau was complete, and she fell back with a faint shriek at the frenzied figure which met her eyes.

"Hush," said the tragedian, putting his finger to his lips.

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"The broker's man," said her husband, in a thrilling whisper. "We had words—he struck me. In a fit of fury I—I—choked him."

"Much?" inquired the bewildered woman.

"Much?" repeated Mr. Cox, frantically. "I've killed him and hidden the body. Now I must escape and fly the country."

The bewilderment on Mrs. Cox's face increased; she was trying to reconcile her husband's statement with a vision of a trim little figure which she had seen ten minutes before with its head tilted backwards studying the sign-post, and which she was now quite certain was Mr. Piper.

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Mr. Cox's reply was interrupted by a loud knock at the hall door, which he was pleased to associate with the police. It gave him a fine opportunity for melodrama, in the midst of which his wife, rightly guessing that Mrs. Berry had returned according to arrangement, went to the door to admit her.

She followed her friend into the drawing-room, and having shaken hands with Mr. Cox, drew her handkerchief from her pocket and applied it to her eyes.

"She's told me all about it," she said, nodding at Mrs. Cox, "and it's worse than you think, much worse. It isn't a broker's man—it's my poor uncle, Joseph Piper."

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A reply came the following evening from Mrs. Berry herself. It was a long letter, and not only long, but badly written and crossed. It began with the weather, asked after Mr. Cox's health, and referred to the writer's; described with much minuteness a strange headache which had attacked Mrs. Cox, together with a long list of the remedies prescribed and the effects of each, and wound up in an out-of-the-way corner, in a vein of cherry optimism which reduced both readers to the verge of madness.

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Mr. Piper held up his hand with a startled gesture for silence. The words died away on his friend's lips as a familiar voice was heard in the passage, and the next moment Mrs. Berry entered the room and stood regarding them.

"I ran down by the same train to make sure you came, uncle," she remarked. "How long have you been here?"

Mr. Piper moistened his lips and gazed wildly at Mr. Cox for guidance.

"Bout—bout five minutes," he stammered.

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"Ah, I've got another little surprise for you," she said, briskly. "Mrs. Cox was so upset at the idea of being alone while you were a wanderer over the face of the earth, that she and I have gone into partnership. We have had a proper deed drawn up, so that now there are two of us to look after things. Eh? What did you say?"

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